

Quick Facts

About...*Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)*

What is HFMD?

HFMD is a common illness of infants and children caused by enteroviruses. It is usually a mild illness and, as its name implies, is characterized by sores in the mouth and a rash on the hands and feet. HFMD is not the same as foot-and-mouth disease (sometimes called hoof-and-mouth disease), which is a viral disease found in farm animals. The most common cause of HFMD is a coxsackievirus infection. More cases of HFMD occur in the summer and fall seasons, but infection can occur anytime during the year.

How is HFMD spread?

HFMD is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of the infected person. Infected persons are most contagious during the first week of illness. You cannot get HFMD from farm animals or pets.

Who is at risk for HFMD?

HFMD typically affects children under 10 years of age, but anyone, including adults, can get HFMD. Infants, children and adolescents are more likely to be infected because they are less likely to have been exposed to the viruses in the past. Older persons are more likely to be immune due to previous exposure to the viruses that cause HFMD.

How do I know if I have HFMD?

The signs and symptoms of HFMD are:

- Painful red blisters on the tongue, mouth, palms of the hands, or soles of the feet
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fatigue

Infants and toddlers will likely be irritable and suffer a loss of appetite. About half of all children infected have no symptoms.

How can HFMD be treated?

There is no specific therapy available, but your health care provider may prescribe medications that make you feel more comfortable. Since antibiotics work only against bacteria, they are not given to fight this viral infection. Citrus, salty, acidic, or spicy foods should be avoided since they may cause discomfort in the area of the blisters in the mouth. Offer foods that do not need much chewing and encourage plenty of clear fluids and cold drinks. Children should rinse their mouths with warm water after meals.

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How is HFMD prevented?

You can help reduce the chance of being infected with HFMD by:

- Practicing good personal hygiene. Be sure to wash hands frequently, especially after using the toilet or changing a diaper, and before preparing food and eating.
- Limiting your exposure to infected persons. Avoid close personal contact with infected persons by avoiding activities such as kissing, hugging, and sharing utensils. HFMD is most contagious during the first week of illness.
- Cleaning and disinfecting contaminated surfaces, particularly in child care and school settings, will reduce possible sources of infection.

There is no specific recommendation for excluding infected children from school or child care settings. Exclusion of ill persons may not prevent additional cases since the virus may be excreted for several weeks after symptoms have disappeared, and some persons who are excreting virus may have no symptoms at all. It may be advisable to exclude children who have blisters in their mouths and are drooling or who have weeping lesions on their hands.

For additional information on fifth disease, please visit the Centers for Disease and Control Web site at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/hfhf.htm>

or the Mayo Clinic Web site at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease/DS00599>

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